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Understanding Domestic Abuse Risk Assessments

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We will cover:

- Understanding risk in the context of domestic abuse
 - How to safely use the SafeLives DASH to assess risk of harm
 - How to identify high risk indicators in cases of domestic abuse
 - 8 Step Domestic Abuse Homicide/Suicide timeline
 - In the session today we will discuss sensitive topics – remember that support is available.
 - Maintain confidentiality - please leave out identifiable features.
 - ‘Challenge the statement, not the person’
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- Solace Advice Line: 0808 802 5565
 - Enfield Duty - advocacy.enfield@solacewomensaid.org & 020 3795 5068
 - National Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0808 2000 247

What is the purpose of risk assessing?

To assess the likelihood of further abuse

Deciding (along with the survivor) who to work with.

To inform multi-agency and team decision making

To evaluate likely harm

To put in place risk management strategies

To safety plan

Allocate resources/inform service provision

The purpose of completing a risk assessment is to ensure as far as possible the future safety of the survivor and any children

DASH Risk Identification Checklist

- The DASH risk assessment tool was developed SafeLives in 2009 to create a common tool for all agencies when identifying and assessing victims of domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and honour-based violence.



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Risk Levels

Standard –

current evidence does not indicate likelihood of causing serious harm

Medium –

Identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. Offender has potential to cause serious harm but is unlikely to do so unless there is a change in circumstances

High – there are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. Potential event could happen at any time & impact would be serious.

High – Home Office 2002/OASys 2006
“A risk which is life threatening and or traumatic; and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological can be expected to be difficult or impossible”

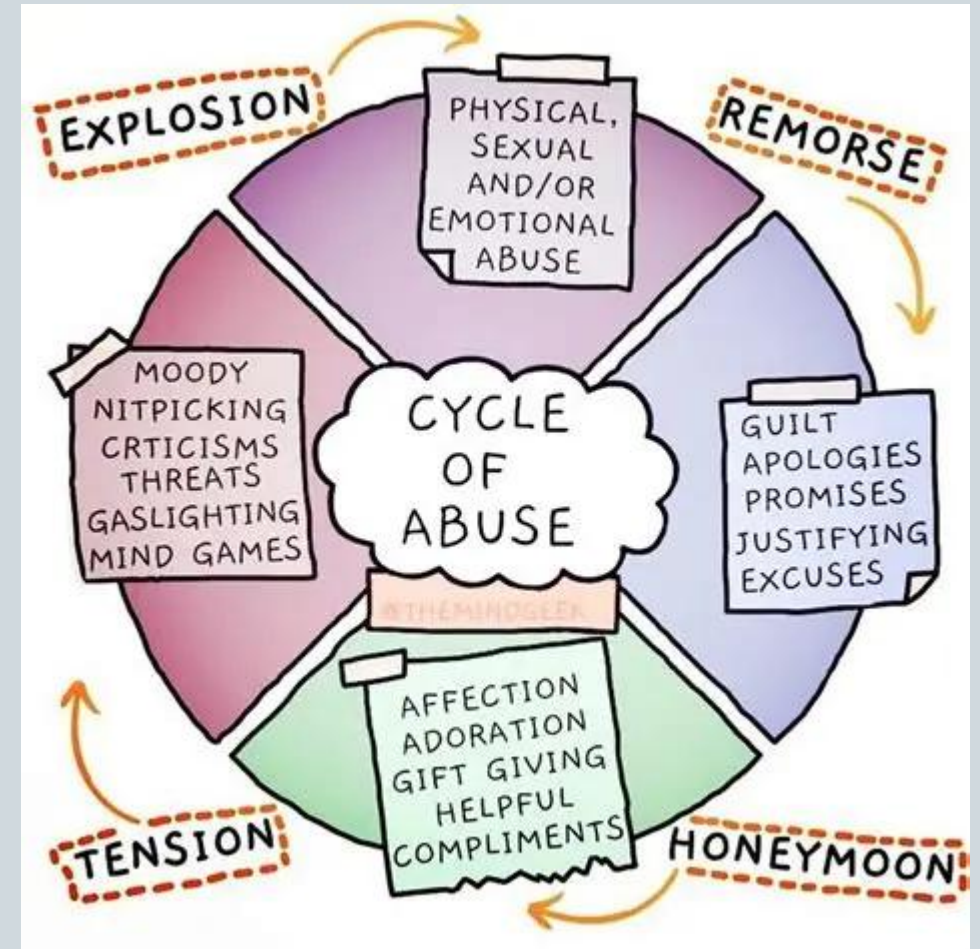
Understanding risk

Remember!

Risk in domestic abuse is dynamic.

It is imperative to work with specialist DA partners when assessing risk and especially when seeking evidence around domestic abuse in order to make sure the investigation is not increasing the risk to the survivor.

Domestic Abuse Homicide and Suicide 8 Step Timeline



National recommendation

That the 8 Step Homicide/Suicide timeline is integrated into the DASH risk assessment following best practice guidance developed by Victim Support.

The aim is to improve front line practitioners in assessing the cumulative risk to the victim of abuse and the power and control tactics of the perpetrator.

Homicide 8 Step Timeline – Stage 1

Homicide - History - A pre-relationship history of stalking or abuse and controlling behaviours.	Suicide - History of victim and perpetrator - Many perpetrators had a history of control, violence and abuse and many victims had histories with vulnerabilities from past abuse.	How the power and control tactics vary for young people 15–25-year-olds
The perpetrator often has a history of controlling behaviour, which may include jealousy, possessiveness, and previous incidents of abuse.	Perpetrator makes out they are victims, being targeted by, or illustrating the person they were in a relationship with is emotionally unstable. The online space is ideal for a perpetrator to create an image of being a “saviour” figure.	They may target their victim through social networks or the online space. Victim uses the online space to highlight their vulnerabilities from the previous history. A perpetrator uses this knowledge as an entry point into the relationship.
This stage sets the foundation for future violence	Online knowledge of previous abusive relationship.	Use of trauma bonding and shared emotional/health vulnerabilities as a form of intimate connections

Homicide 8 Step Timeline – Stage 2

Homicide – Develops Quickly	Suicide -History of victim and perpetrator	How the power and control tactics vary for young people 15–25-year-olds
The romance develops quickly into a serious relationship.	Controlling relationships often form very quickly, with early co-habitation, early pregnancy or early declarations of love being common.	Connections through distant online friends or circles of friends can be considered as validation of the perpetrator, without any direct contact. This validation creates a false narrative of the perpetrator.
The perpetrator showers their victim with presents, flowers, dinners, holidays, buying personal things and other forms of love bombing. Love bombing online can increase intimacy and connection.	The perpetrator create a persona or image of themselves which they promote to their victim and family members.	Small online glimpses into the background of the victim and/or perpetrator can create bonds, but the perpetrator can use online communication to control what they release or expose.
Early offers of long-term commitment including marriage are shared with key family members/relatives	Influential family members/relatives are targeted with gifts or close contact to gain acceptance.	The development of an online persona, which re-enforces their image and perceived commitment to their victim re-enforces the relation to a global audience

Homicide 8 Step Timeline – Stage 3

Homicide – Coercive Control Relationship warning signs	Suicide -Relationship	How the power and control tactics vary for young people 15–25-year-olds
The relationship becomes dominated by coercive control and violence. The perpetrator is quick-tempered. General anxiety / depression or levels of insecurity. Reinforcing their intimacy whilst creating control	The control and violence appears to begin in the early relationship, with some victims declaring fear and entrapment within the first couple of weeks.	Young people describe relationships in different way. They may describe being friends as separate from “seeing someone” and from being “in a relationship”. However this disguises the types of abuse which can take place in each of these three stages.
Use of the online space, texts, images, messages to create closer intimacy and begin to exclude others.	A perpetrator can access a victim’s wider family and friends and use the connections to start to control the behaviour of their victim or highly vulnerabilities which do not reflect reality.	Fear and entrapment can be created by sharing intimate pictures or images and threatening to post them.

Homicide 8 Step Timeline – Stage 4

Homicide – Trigger	Suicide - Disclosure	How the power and control tactics vary for young people 15–25-year-olds
A trigger threatens the perpetrator’s control such as separation/ threats of separation. A specific event that could prompt retaliation / revenge on the victim. This threat can cause mental health deterioration for victim.	The victim discloses DA. Disclosure can represent a potential escalation in risk. For example calling the Police, reporting to friends/family/work health care professionals.	Excuses to have to come offline or long gaps in social media presence can be a sign that a young person is suffering abuse.
A victim will disclose abuse but may use different medium to express it. The withdrawal from group chats or increasing times where their partner “comments” or intervenes on a chat are all signs of abuse and increased control.	Disclosure can be through deterioration in mental wellbeing and seeking mental health support, or increase in alcohol / drug dependency	A reduction in the number of video or pictorial posts can indicate a loss of independence.

Homicide 8 Step Timeline – Stage 5

Homicide – Escalation	Suicide – Help seeking	How the power and control tactics vary for young people 15–25-year-olds
An increase in the intensity or frequency of the partner's control tactics.	Help seeking often occurs when the victim considered things has become more serious, often after an escalation in abuse, or fears for the safety of children	Victim may set up a separate online persona as a way of seeking help.
Increased control over access to family/friends, or threats intimidation or violent/emotional outbursts in front of family/friends	Help seeking can be through self harm or attempted suicides as a cry for help	Online intimidation of friends and family members are used by the perpetrator
Control over financial management to limit the victim's ability to exit		The false online narrative that the perpetrator has created is used as a counter narrative for any sought help. This is an online footprint of controlling behaviour.

Homicide 8 Step Timeline – Stage 6

Homicide – Change in thinking	Suicide – Suicidal ideation	How the power and control tactics vary for young people 15–25-year-olds
Change in thinking- The perpetrator chooses to move on, through revenge or by homicide. Attempts at reconciliation.	Suicide ideation may be identified or escalated for the victim.	Young people may feel the online space is the best way to flag mental health vulnerabilities or suicidal ideation, posting certain messages or images to close friends. These may be less explicit, such a sharing online videos with underlying suicidal images.
Children can be targeted and the perpetrator can create situations that result in victim blaming, including reporting them for assaulting them or telling family member that have had to leave the family home to protect themselves	Self-harm or suicidal ideation in perpetrators may also be a warning marker. There are cases where perpetrators may encourage suicide of the victim	Perpetrators may use the online space to encourage suicidality, posting explicit images or highlighting the weakness of their victim. They may use social media to flag their own suicidality, alluding to their victim as the cause, further isolating and humiliating them.

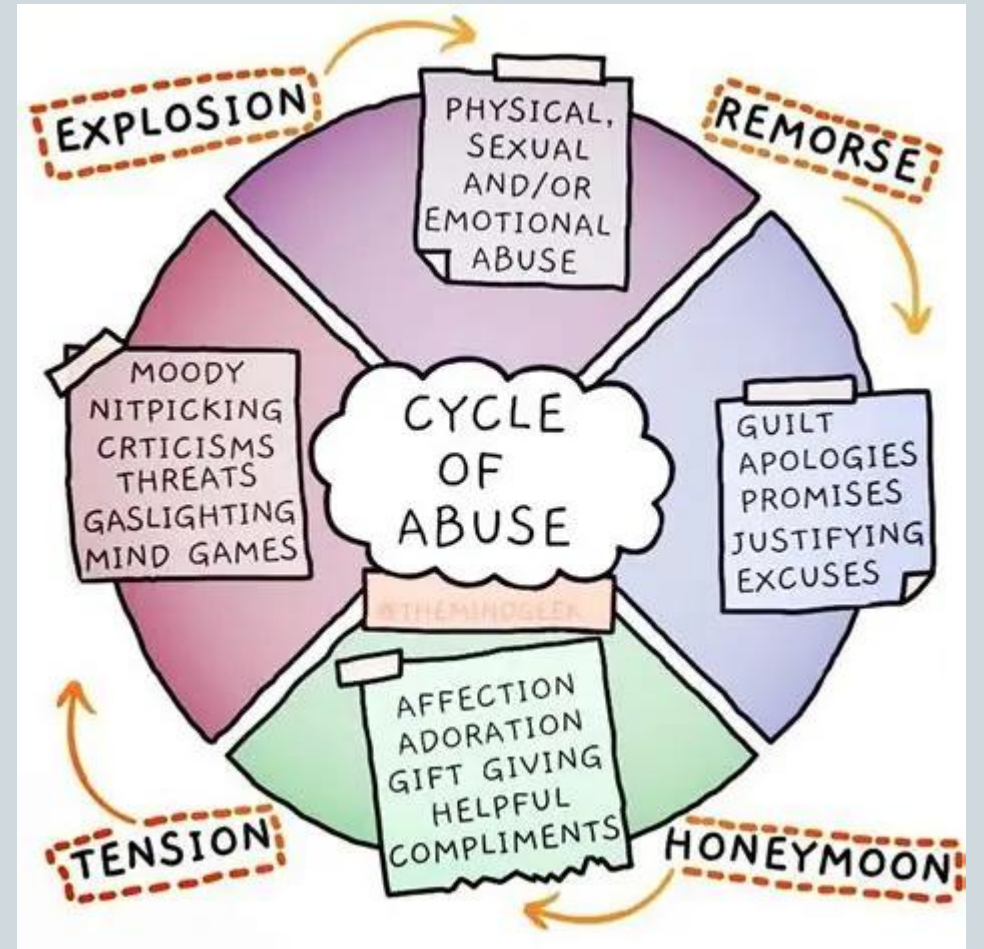
Homicide 8 Step Timeline – Stage 7

Homicide – Planning	Suicide – Complete entrapment	How the power and control tactics vary for young people 15–25-year-olds
The perpetrator might buy weapons or seek opportunities to get the victim alone	Victims feels trapped in a situation with no escape and nothing would get better.	For 16- 25 year olds, the online space is not an extension of themselves it is part their identity and somewhere they belong.
Perpetrator may orchestrate a move of home so they are more isolated from friends/family	Perpetrator uses power and control tactics which further humiliate the victim, such a unemployment, loss of independence	Perpetrators turn this identity against the victim using the online space and wider online community to undermine that identity. This increases isolation and a sense that there is no way out.

Homicide 8 Step Timeline – Stage 8

Homicide – Homicide	Suicide – Suicide	How the power and control tactics vary for young people 15–25-year-olds
The perpetrator kills his or her partner and possibly hurts others such as the victim's children.	Perpetrator used further isolation tactics to humiliate or degrade their victim. Nonresponse to cries for help, nonattendance when their victim is hospitalised, openly starting new relationships.	The preparator immediately shuts off all online contact. (ghosting).
	In some cases, the perpetrator will use a pattern of engagement, love bombing and ghosting as a cycle of online abuse. This is calculated to ensure their victim is emotionally disoriented and is further control by the perpetrator	In a domestic abuse context is a deliberate manipulative act aimed at isolating their victim and as a form of emotional cruelty, increasing their emotional vulnerability and risk of suicidality
	This has a longer-term impact on the victim, even after the relationship has ended, resulting in suicidality.	

Introducing the DASH



Enabling a safe space

“If you’re not believed, then you can’t get safety, it means the police can’t help you, the court can’t help you – and the abuser can act with impunity. It means there’s no way out.”

– Dr Jane Monckton Smith

Enabling a safe space

Think about times when you have found it easy or difficult to share something personal with someone.

What was it about their questions, tone, body language and behavior that made it easy or difficult to confide in them?

What could you do to help someone feel at ease?

Asking Questions

- Try out a variety of options to see what is most comfortable for you.
- Different individuals may respond better to different approaches.
- Make sure to ask in a private environment and do not use family or friends as interpreters.

Risk Identification Methods:

Visible Risk

- predicting from knowledge
- based on risk factors
- uses a tool and evidence based approach
- informs professional judgement

Professional Judgement

- uses knowledge & professional experience
- can be based on victims perception
- utilises observation and assessment

Escalation

- in severity and frequency

Before you start:

- Establish how much time the victim has to talk to you: is it safe to talk now? What are safe contact details?
- Establish the whereabouts of the perpetrator and children.
- Explain why you are asking these questions and how it relates to the MARAC

Questions 1-8

Questions 1-4

1. Has the current incident resulted in injury?
2. Are you very frightened?
3. What are you afraid? Is it further injury or violence?
4. Do you feel isolated from friends/family...do they stop you seeing friends, family, GP

Q5: Are you feeling depressed or having suicidal thoughts?

- Many say they won't as they have children
- Many have made suicide attempts already
- Many self-harm
- What is suicidal ideation?
- What can you ask if they have suicidal ideation?

Possible risk factors

- Isolation
- Cultural factors surrounding 'honour' or shame
- Multiple disadvantage- drugs and alcohol, homelessness, mental ill health
- Involvement with the criminal justice system
- Financial issues- poverty, debt
- Insecure immigration status- including managing trauma they may have faced in their country of origin
- Withdrawal of services
- Being re-located somewhere remote due to DA
- Child safeguarding, and child access
- The fear of not being believed
- Sexual abuse
- C-PTSD

DASH Q6: Have you separated or tried to separate in the last year?

- When did they separate?
- How long have they been together?
- Married or not?
- Women are most likely to be killed at the point of separation
- First 1 to 2 months or first year most dangerous

DASH Q7: Is there conflict over child contact?

- Perp's will use children as weapons
- Perp's pursue & control/stalk victims through the family courts often citing parental alienation
- How long have they been together?
- Married or not?
- Family Courts put children at risk
- Post separation abuse in DA Act 2021

DASH Q8: Does...constantly text, call, contact, follow stalk or harass you?

1. Are you very frightened?
2. Is there previous domestic abuse or stalking/harassment history?
3. Have they vandalised or destroyed your property?
4. Have they turned up unannounced more than three times a week?
5. Have they followed or loitered near your home or workplace?
6. Have they made threats of a physical or sexual violence nature?
7. Have they harassed or stalked any third party since the harassment began?
8. Have they acted violently towards anyone else during the stalking incident?
9. Have they engaged other people to help with their activities?
10. Has the stalker had problems in the past year with drugs, alcohol or mental health?
11. Is the stalker suicidal? Is there last resort thinking/finality?
12. Have they ever been in trouble with the police or do they have a criminal history?

Questions 9-16

Questions 9-12

9. Are you pregnant or have you recently had a baby in the past 18 months?

10 & 11. Is the abuse happening more often? Is the abuse getting worse?

12. Does... try to control everything you do and/or are they excessively jealous (re: are you policed at home, what to wear).

Questions 13-15

13. Has Ever used weapons or objects to hurt you?

14. Has... ever threatened to kill you or someone else and you believed them?

15. Has Ever attempted to strangle / choke / suffocate or drown you

DA ACT 2021 S52 Non-fatal strangulation

If someone cannot breathe that constitutes battery eg, an attempt to cut off the airways.

Cannot argue that someone who suffers harm from strangulation during sex has consented.

If the suspect was considered reckless and causes harm then this is a crime.

Q16: Does... do or say anything of a sexual nature that make you feel bad or that physically hurts you or someone else?

Question was designed by survivors:

- Non consensual sex is rape but many in intimate relationships see rape as someone jumping out of the bushes
- It may be crimed by police and client may receive a follow-up call – it is their right not to take it any further
- Covers making people watch porn/sleep with other people

- **HIGH RISK FACTOR**

Questions 17-24

Q17: Is there anybody else who has threatened you or you are afraid of?

- Detail who and what they have said, done, any proof?
- This is the trigger question for “So Called HBA” - 10 extra questions.
- Safety planning may need to include others
- Consider extended family if you suspect HBA

Questions 18-21

18. Do you know if ... has hurt anyone else?

19. The Abuser Has ever mistreated an animal or a family pet?

20. Are there any financial issues? E.g. are you dependent on them for money, have they lost their, debts?

21. The Abuser... Has had problems with drugs, alcohol or mental ill-health in the last year?

Questions 22-24

22. The Abuser... Has ever threatened or attempted suicide?

23. The Abuser... Has ever breached bail or an injunction and or any agreement for when they can see you/and/or the child/children?

24. Do you know if... has ever been in trouble with police or has a criminal history?

Clare's Law – Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme

Right to ask –

when you ask the police or agencies for information on another person. If you are worried that another person could hurt or abuse you, you can ask if they have a police record. Family, friends or those who may be responsible for your safeguarding such as a social worker, can also ask for you.

Right to know -

Police can check if the person there are concerns about has a police record. If they do have a record, the police will share that information to protect you.

[Domestic violence disclosure scheme 'Clare's Law'](#)

[Request information under Clare's Law: Make a Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme \(DVDS\) application | Police.uk](#)

Any Questions?

